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SUBJECT: TRANSMITTING MINUTES OF DISCUSSION BETWEEN MR. McGHEE AND SALAHEDDIN BEY

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With reference to the telegram above regarding the conversations between Mr. McGhee and Salaheddin Bey, I transmit herewith a copy of the full text of the minutes of the discussions.

Jefferson Caffery

JCaffery:jdw

Enclosure:
Minutes of discussion between Mr. McGhee and Salaheddin Bey

Copies to:
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(Classification)

MINUTES OF MEETING

Between Mr. McGhee and Salaheddin Bey

March 31, 1951

Salaheddin Bey:

I have a lot to say at this meeting and it is very grave indeed. I would like to tell Your Excellency it is concerning the outstanding questions between the Egyptian Government and the British and the talks which have taken place with the British Ambassador and afterwards the British Foreign Secretary. The Egyptian Government deemed it advisable, in view of public opinion and the attitude of Parliament, to ask for a definite stand at the earliest possible moment. It should not be forgotten that these recent talks were only links in a long chain of talks and negotiations and efforts which were made to realize the demands and aspirations of Egypt for the past five years. I consider, therefore, that we are now at a cross-roads. Either we reach an agreement which will realize the national demands or we will reach a crisis between the two governments which might cause great anxiety in Egypt and in countries of the Middle East.

I am expressing this to you first of all in your capacity as the Assistant Secretary of State of America and of course I know that conditions in the Middle East are of grave concern to you to a very great extent. I was very glad to hear from you after the Istanbul Conference of the increased interest of America in the Middle East and that that interest has increased more than before. I would like to speak to you, too, on the other hand, as a friend and I am anxious to ask for your assistance in this matter which causes us grave concern. I have already explained to you in detail in our past meeting the Egyptian point of view and I trust that you have found for yourself that we are not unreasonable in our attitude; we are practical, and we would not omit the considerations of the practical side regarding the requirements for defense of the Middle East and general international conditions.

We agree to the conclusion of the treaty with Britain according to which British forces may come to Egypt in case of actual war; to be more definite in the event of actual aggression against Egypt or Britain or one of the adjacent

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countries to Egypt. But we do not accept that there should be in Egypt British forces in peace time. We did not ask for the evacuation of the British forces now or on the spot or immediately, but we have accepted that evacuation should take place within a year and during this period it is possible to raise the standards of the Egyptian Army in training and equipment, in such a manner as to become able to replace the British forces which we are asking to evacuate. That is, to replace the forces permitted by the 1936 treaty to remain in Egypt. These forces are no more than 10,000 combatant troops, 400 pilots, and auxiliary personnel attached to them. There is no doubt that we can afford to double this amount within the period of a year, particularly if we take into consideration the great speed with which general international preparedness is confronting the present international situation. As to the British base in Fayed we have undertaken to maintain that base so as to be in good working order in time of war, but in time of peace it should be handed over to the Egyptian Army.

I understand from the course of my recent talks with Mr. Bevin that he agrees in principle to the transfer of responsibility of defense to the Egyptian Army. I have naturally interpreted that as their being prepared to evacuate. He also agreed to handing over the base in Fayed to Egypt and referred the matter to their technical people to study the details. Among these details is the period after which the transfer of responsibility may take place.

You know that Mr. Bevin relinquished his duties as Foreign Secretary and has been replaced by Mr. Morrison. Recently we hear from the British press and news agencies a new tune which indicates going back on what Mr. Bevin had agreed to. Also in the British House of Commons several attacks accompanied by releases in the British press with explanation of the difficulty of the position of Mr. Morrison and his being forced in view of the difficult position of the government in Parliament to take a firmer stand than that which Mr. Bevin was ready to accede to. Whether this parliamentary attack is premeditated or planned to influence us or whether it is natural, I would like to assure Your Excellency it does not influence either the Egyptian public opinion or the Egyptian Government. We have absolutely no concern with parliamentary conditions in Britain. I did not speak to Mr. Bevin in his personal capacity but I spoke to him as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom.

All the aforesaid is connected with the question of evacuation but there is still another important question and that is the question of the unity of Egypt and the Sudan. We naturally look upon these two things as being closely connected together. Our attitude regarding this question as I have already explained to Your Excellency is that we and our compatriots the Sudanese are agreed that the Sudan should have its own government and parliament in unity with Egypt represented by the Egyptian crown, for foreign policy, defense, and currency and other matters which the Egyptians and their compatriots the Sudanese may agree to.

Here again, to be practical we have agreed that there should be a transition period of two years duration. After which, of course, the Sudanese may enjoy self-government in unity with Egypt as already explained. Mr. Bevin had tried to dissuade me from tying the two questions together, that is, unity with Egypt and the Sudan and the question of evacuation. He told me that we should approach agreement on the two questions separately. Whereas our viewpoints in the first question, of unity, are far removed from each other, for that reason he asked me not to stop the agreement by linking the questions together but I gave him to understand very clearly that Egypt cannot accept the separation of these two questions and that agreement is conditional on the two things being considered together. His Excellency, the Egyptian Ambassador in London, repeated the same things to Mr. Bevin and we have told him in all clarity that we are waiting now for a reply concerning the questions.

Mr. McGhee:

I would like to say that I greatly appreciate your confidence in telling us this, both on behalf of my government and myself personally. Although we, of course, have followed the course of your negotiations with the British we have in the past not been a party to your negotiations and would not be willing at this time to become a part of the negotiations. It is true that we have both you and the British as friends and we have discussed these matters with both of you. Basically, we have sought to make it clear that we recognize three separate questions in the issues (1) You have certain legitimate nationalistic aspirations which your people feel very deeply about; (2) The British have what they consider certain rights under the treaty and we believe they have a genuine desire to make a contribution to the solution of the problem at hand; and (3) There is the consideration of the defense of the Middle East itself, both for individual countries concerned and for the defense of the entire area. Defense of the Middle East is an area problem, we have always felt.

We were very encouraged at the reports received from both you and the British of the progress you were making on these negotiations. We were disturbed, however, about the retrogression you reported. We hope, of course, that this is not the case in truth. We appreciate very much your patience in the matter and we hope you will stay in this position until the British reply is received. In general, in approaching problems of this sort they should not be linked. In general, it is better to keep the problems separate. When you get linked sometimes they become deadlocked and you cannot envisage what the solution of one or another would be.

We understand fully the position you have mentioned and you have made yourself very clear. I would like to assure you that I will discuss these matters in London when I return there.

Salaheddin Bey:

I would like to assure you that we would not limit ourselves to the questions at hand from the Egyptian aspirations point of view by itself; we have looked at it, too, from the British viewpoint, providing, of course, that they are within reasonable bounds from the point of view of Middle East defense. I think that the Middle East countries should have the first right in the defense of their own territories but as to the British, all others come in as Allies when war actually breaks out. This is the basis of what we offer the British. We also offered them that we undertake to maintain the base so that they may depend on it at the outbreak of war. We first proposed a certain period for evacuation which, in our opinion, is quite sufficient for the Egyptian Army to get strong and to be able to replace a limited number of troops which was permitted by the 1936 treaty to remain in Egypt. There is no doubt that the settlement of the evacuation question on this basis does not only help to depend on Egypt and the Egyptian Army in the event of the outbreak of actual war, but it will also constitute a period for organizing defense in the whole territory of the Middle East on these same terms. That is, depend on the peoples of these territories themselves and on their armies. There is no doubt that the final result will depend very much on the assistance that is given to these armies and on the economic assistance that is given to these people.

To sum up, Egypt and the Arab countries, of whose tendencies I know quite a lot, are prepared to contribute their share in the general preparedness to face aggression to maintain peace and unity of the free nations of the world, but they insist that they should

have first say in their own territory and that the help and assistance of other countries comes secondary and when it is needed, but not to leave the whole burden of defense to other countries.

As to the question of separating the question of unity of Egypt and the Sudan and the question of evacuation, it is improbable that the Egyptian people will accept it in any way. Since we consider what is going on in the Sudan as a flagrant aggression and we cannot think of entering into an alliance with the British when they impose such an aggression upon us. If the British have some excuse in the first question, i.e., evacuation, since that question is connected with international conditions and defense of the Middle East, they have absolutely no excuse in the question of unity of Egypt and the Sudan. They are seeking to break this down. I would like also to say in all frankness that we cannot really separate these two questions from our attitude towards the international conditions in general. If it is not possible to have these two questions settled on the basis of satisfying our national aspirations the Egyptian people cannot understand how we could side with the bloc which includes the British when they are violating our rights. On the contrary, the Egyptian people will be more inclined to take the stand against the British in defense of these rights.

Now I come to the final result which I have meant to convey by my talks to Your Excellency. We are waiting for the return from London of the British Ambassador, bringing with him the decision of the British Government not only on the question of evacuation, but also on the question of Sudanese unity. If this decision realizes the national aspirations of Egypt, well and good. If it is disappointing, I can assure you that the present Egyptian Government or any other Government cannot go on with these talks or cannot ask the nation to be patient another further period. On the contrary, the nation will demand from the Government as it has demanded in the Egyptian press and in Parliament, that we should stop these talks. If the Egyptian Government comes to that, the only step then is the abrogation of the 1936 treaty and the 1899 agreement as the Government actually promised in the speech from the throne. Then a long political dispute between us and the British will begin and no one knows but God what the result will be.

This is what I wanted to explain to Your Excellency to see how you consider it in view of American interests so that you may work with me if you are able to do so to obviate this. It is my opinion and I believe your visit will give you the opportunity to do something productive in that respect.

One more thing I would like to say to you is that all my previous statements to you today I have made under my own responsibility as Minister of Foreign Affairs and I did not ask the counsel of His Excellency Nahas Pasha or my other colleagues. I will not ask their counsel until after the arrival of the British Ambassador. But I must think now about what I should do. I believe that it is very probable that Nahas Pasha and my colleagues will agree to that plan since it is the only one acceptable to the Egyptian people but granting that they will not accept it I know at least personally what I intend to do. That is what I have explained to you. And since I am being frank with you as to my intentions regarding my future attitude I consider it my duty to be frank with you insofar as the maximum good I can do is concerned. Actually it does not and could not affect the basis and general lines of approach. The only things affected are the details. I am prepared to accept the period after which the complete evacuation be achieved by land and sea and air as that not a single British soldier remains in Egypt, I am ready to increase that period to 18 months. This period, I believe, is more than sufficient to get an Egyptian Army prepared and raise it to the standard necessary to do the job. I am also prepared that that transition period in the Sudan should be three years instead of two years. I repeat that this is my own personal opinion and I do not know how His Excellency Nahas Pasha will look at it. Nahas Pasha actually had approached me proposing a one year period of evacuation.

Mr. McGhee:

I accept this as a statement of your policy. Of course I recognize that it is subject to change in the light of its submission to the Cabinet but I believe also the Prime Minister is likely to accept it as his view. We, I think, must deal with it as the views of the Egyptian Government, therefore, we take it seriously and will give it every consideration.

Without any attempt to rebutt Your Excellency's position, I would like to give a few comments.

We entirely approve of the development of the indigenous defensive forces of the Middle East and feel that the British themselves fully accept that principle even though they may not appear to do so at times. One of the purposes of the Tri-Partite Declaration was to furnish the Middle East an opportunity to play a part in Middle East defense. We took that decision in the face of considerable criticism in our own country. We took that

position in order to make it clear that the furnishing of arms to Egypt for defense purposes was a good thing from the standpoint of our own foreign policy. In Istanbul we discussed the defense of the Middle East and we recognized there are many gaps which should be filled and we as a government approached such matters entirely from the standpoint of dealing with countries of the Middle East in the hope that they will maximize their own defense capabilities. There are many aspects of the discussions which are military aspects and I do not feel competent to comment on them. I think it would be evident that the defense of Egypt or the Cairo-Suez area would be difficult to organize for the participation of foreign troops. As you know countries adjacent to Egypt are quite small and defense must precede the brief period of time it might take the enemy forces to cross these small countries.

Also at Istanbul I felt that our real problem in the Middle East is a relatively short-ranged problem in that the principle danger of Soviet invasion is the relative weakness of the West. We are re-arming and assisting nations elsewhere to re-arm and feel that in a short period of time we will have more than fulfilled that purpose. There is a situation now which is a situation of war. We are fighting in Korea. The type of action which the Greeks know recently was actually a shooting war and they know that this type of war short of localized action could break out again. That is why we thought that this present time should be considered as a state of international emergency corresponding to a state of war. During that period every effort should be made to maximize defense efforts. No matter how large an Army the Egyptians are able to build the Middle East also needs all other foreign troops which could be brought in. I am certain that Britain realizes that if she ever brings troops into this area it would not be for a colonial type of regime as before but to defend the Middle East against Russia.

I cannot believe any grievances against the British could be considered even in the same light or aura as the menace which threatens the whole Middle East. And you have a new type of imperialism which demonstrates itself to be worse than any imperialism the British imposed. You have seen what happens when this imperialism is imposed upon a friendly nation.

I believe that Britain is extricating itself generally from the colonial type of government. They have given up most of the countries in the world which they had under the old colonialism. I think that they find themselves in an awkward position of

international emergency now. They see also all the interests of the middle East and the friendly world threatened by Russian aggression.

With respect to the Sudanese question I do think that the word "aggression" is a little strong word to use in these circumstances. It is a result of situations in the past which may not have been taken care of to fullest satisfaction. Nevertheless it is not the result of a *new* policy which the word aggression denotes. The British feel that the Sudan should be entitled to its ultimate disposition. I can say that in general I hope that the British position, when it comes to you, will find a basis for discussion which will lead to settlement of the problem. I think you do realize the dangerous situation the Middle East would be in if you found yourself in an impasse with Britain. The Arab states are already unstable and insecure. It could have repercussions also in your economic state.

I hope you and the Foreign Minister will agree that the leaders of great states should not only lead but follow public opinion. Go as far as you can toward meeting their point of view and working out a solution which will be satisfactory to both. In the light of what has happened in Iran, our government would greatly regret if some new drastic item were brought out which would bring up nationalistic feelings which could lead nowhere.

We can assure you that we could never revert to colonialism which the world has known in the past. We feel that this calls for an evolutionary type of action for nations who find themselves in a position which have a certain aura of colonialism.

Salaheddin Bey:

I understand all that you have said and I appreciate the importance of the considerations you have pointed out. I very much regret that time does not permit that I give you a reply to all the points mentioned by you but if you had a chance to see or to read my talks with the British Ambassador and later with Mr. Bevin you would find a convincing reply to the points you have raised or at least an explanation of the attitude on the stand we are taking now in defense of our national rights. It is a state which we cannot change. We cannot take another course--it is the only stand we can take. But I would like to reply

to the analogy you made concerning imperialism and the Russian menace. I personally understand this menace in its real aspects. But the masses do not understand it. To them it is something intangible,...while they have actually seen imperialism and have actually suffered many years of imperialism. I agree with you that we cannot ignore the masses in this case. I believe that what is now taking place in Iran should be regarded as a practical lesson to us, to you, and to the British. How would this matter be when we are the leaders and the intellectuals and are not satisfied with the claims of the British insofar as the question of unity and the question of the Sudan is concerned? This has been explained in detail in my talks with the British Ambassador and later with Mr. Bevin.

What would be your attitude if a break takes place between the Egyptians and the British?

Mr. McGhee:

I could not possibly answer that question at this time.